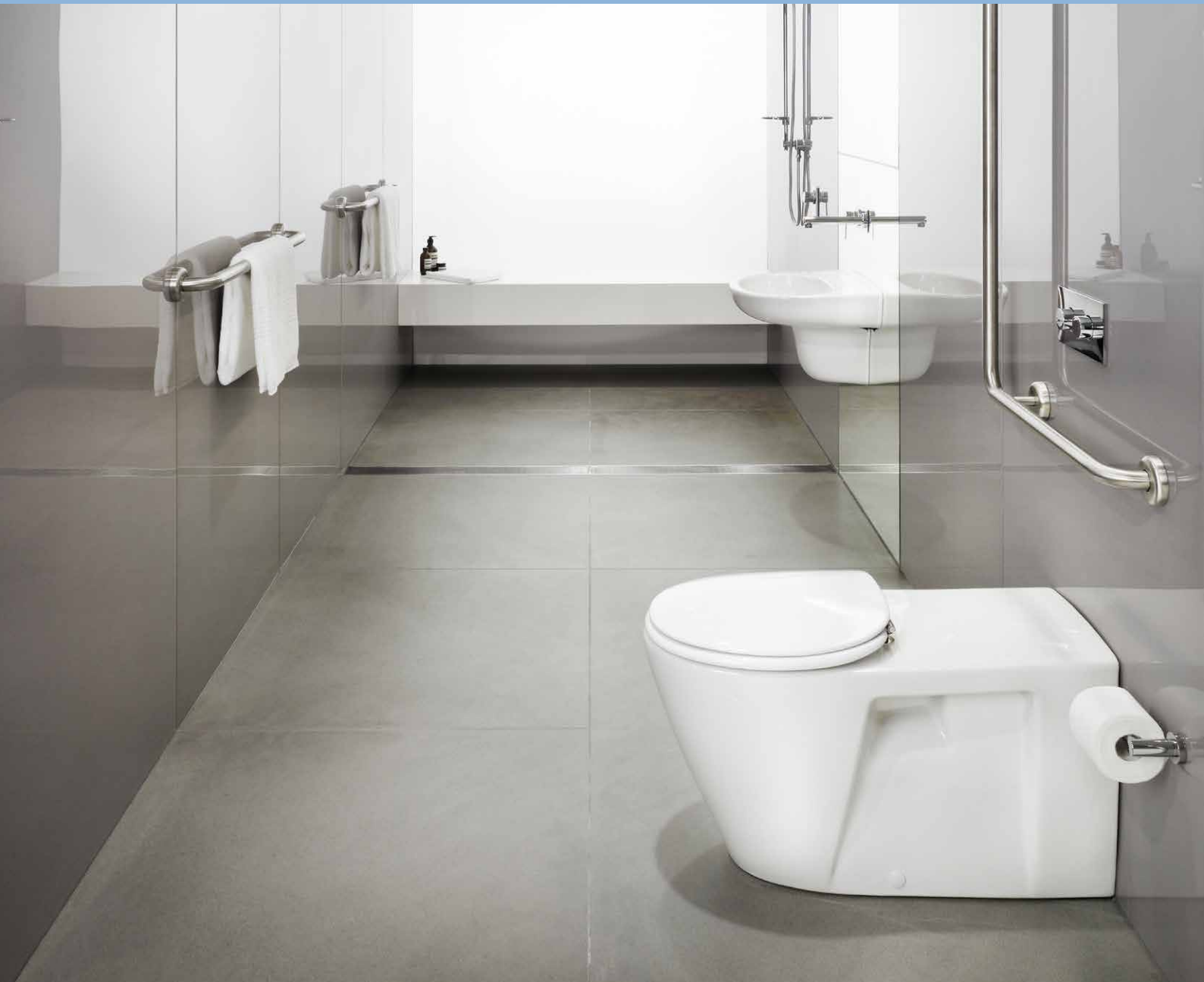


FORM AND FUNCTION: CURRENT TRENDS IN BATHROOM DESIGN



INTRODUCTION

Recent design trends in bathrooms have seen equal weighting being placed upon functionality and aesthetics. As the most recent ISH Frankfurt trade show demonstrated, this focus – aesthetically a blend of art deco and minimalism – has since spread from interior design and over into product design itself. Curves are in fashion once more with fixtures and fittings, and contrasting colours of black and white with metal finishes such as copper, brass or bronze as highlights are emerging as a popular trend. Of course, design trends come and go. However, the products and styles that seek to innovate upon existing knowledge have the potential to hold a much longer lasting impact.

Bathrooms may not be where the majority of anyone's time is spent, but they do adopt a particularly important role within our homes with their baseline purposes of hygiene and waste management. As an indicator of their role, more than half of the average Australian home's indoor water usage is from the bathroom – 34 per cent from the shower and 26 per cent from toilet usage.ⁱ

However, the focuses of development within bathroom design go beyond the aspects of hygiene and waste management now more than ever. Sustainable design; promotion of health; comfort and personalisation; digital and technological integration, and a reduction in maintenance are all key concerns in contemporary bathroom design.ⁱⁱ

In order to answer these concerns and continue making a visual impact architects and specifiers – and consumers – are increasingly turning to product design itself.

LOW FLOW FIXTURES

Low flow fixtures are increasingly being relied upon within contemporary bathroom design for their environmentally sustainable and cost-saving characteristics.

Standard showerheads use between 15 and 25 litres of water per minute, while a three star rated water efficient showerhead can use "as little as 6 or 7 litres per minute."ⁱ

The appeal of these types of fixtures is multi-fold. Reducing the amount of water consumed has the added benefit of reducing the energy required to heat a larger volume and therefore a household's energy bill. Over ten years, the gas hot water costs for a standard showerhead are approximately \$1500, compared to a 47 per cent reduction down to \$790 over ten years for a water-efficient showerhead.ⁱⁱ

Furthermore, the reduction in water usage does not result in a reduced water flow, relying on higher-pressure techniques to keep the flow consistent.

HEAT RECOVERY SYSTEMS

Heat recovery systems are also being adopted, albeit on a larger scale within the house. Designed to supplement mechanical heating needs, heat recovery systems take in excess heat (such as that which is present in bathrooms after a shower) use that to warm the vented air as would usually be required. The original flush toilet may have been invented in 1596, but its general concept and functionality has largely remained the same across the centuries.

More recently, however, the toilet has seen some upgrades. The integration of modern digital technology with the classic toilet concept – made famous by brands such as Japan's Toto – has taken off.



“ More than half of the average Australian home's indoor water usage is from the bathroom – 34 per cent from the shower and 26 per cent from toilet usage.¹ ”

INTELLIGENT & RIMLESS TOILETS

Toilets are now able to come with heated seats for extra comfort, in-built bidet functions for improved hygiene and even motion sensors to lift the lid when you walk into the room, removing the need for unnecessary contact.

Furthermore, certain toilets are even capable of cleaning themselves, utilising ultraviolet light and electrolysed water to kill germs and remove waste.ⁱ Moving forward, intelligent toilets may even be able to provide non-invasive health assessments.ⁱⁱ

Outside of requiring a power point, rimless toilets are also a recent development that has seen increasing application in contemporary bathroom design, featuring a cleaner, more streamlined aesthetic than their older, rimmed counterparts.

Without a rim, there are fewer places for germs to grow and accumulate, and the pan itself is easier to clean without any hard-to-reach places. Splash-free flushing can also mean more efficient cleaning and a higher level of precision, reducing the frequency of chemical cleaning.ⁱⁱⁱ

LARGE FORMAT TILES

The potential of large format tiles are being recognised, for aesthetic purposes and for having proven themselves as requiring less maintenance and simplifying the bathroom cleaning process.

While tiles themselves are rarely the source of problems within bathrooms, it is the grout in between them that often develops mould over time – particularly in shower stalls where there is long-term moisture exposure and where water may not be draining properly.

Large format tiles encourage cleaner and more health-conscious bathrooms by minimising the amount of grout needed overall, and thus areas of potential porosity where mould can begin to grow. Left unchecked, mould growth can cause reactions similar to allergies such as respiratory-related symptoms, chronic coughs, or even neurological problems in some of the worst-case scenarios.ⁱ

STANDALONE & INTEGRATED BATHTUBS

Bathing has featured in numerous cultures across human history for both practical purposes and for ritual. Soaking tubs that go hand-in-hand with a shower pre-clean are a given fixture within many Japanese homes, and where space does not permit, the local bathhouse takes over. Bathhouses are often common fixtures in many countries in the Northern hemisphere such as Russia, where they have been used across history to combat the cold, dry climate.¹

However, for space and time efficiency, showers are often the preference for daily usage within Australian households, and our climate is humid enough to not warrant any spread of communal bathhouses. Despite that, there has been a general shift around attitudes towards bathrooms and bathing.

While showers are typically still integral to our bathrooms and everyday cleaning regimens, bathrooms are no longer simply utilitarian spaces to get in, clean up, and get out of. Rather, they are becoming private spaces where occupants can relax, separated from everyday stressors.

The outcome of this is a refocus on the bathtub, whether they are standalone as a feature within the room, or integrated with a shower for space efficiency. Wherever space permits, the benefits of bathtubs are being recognised once more.

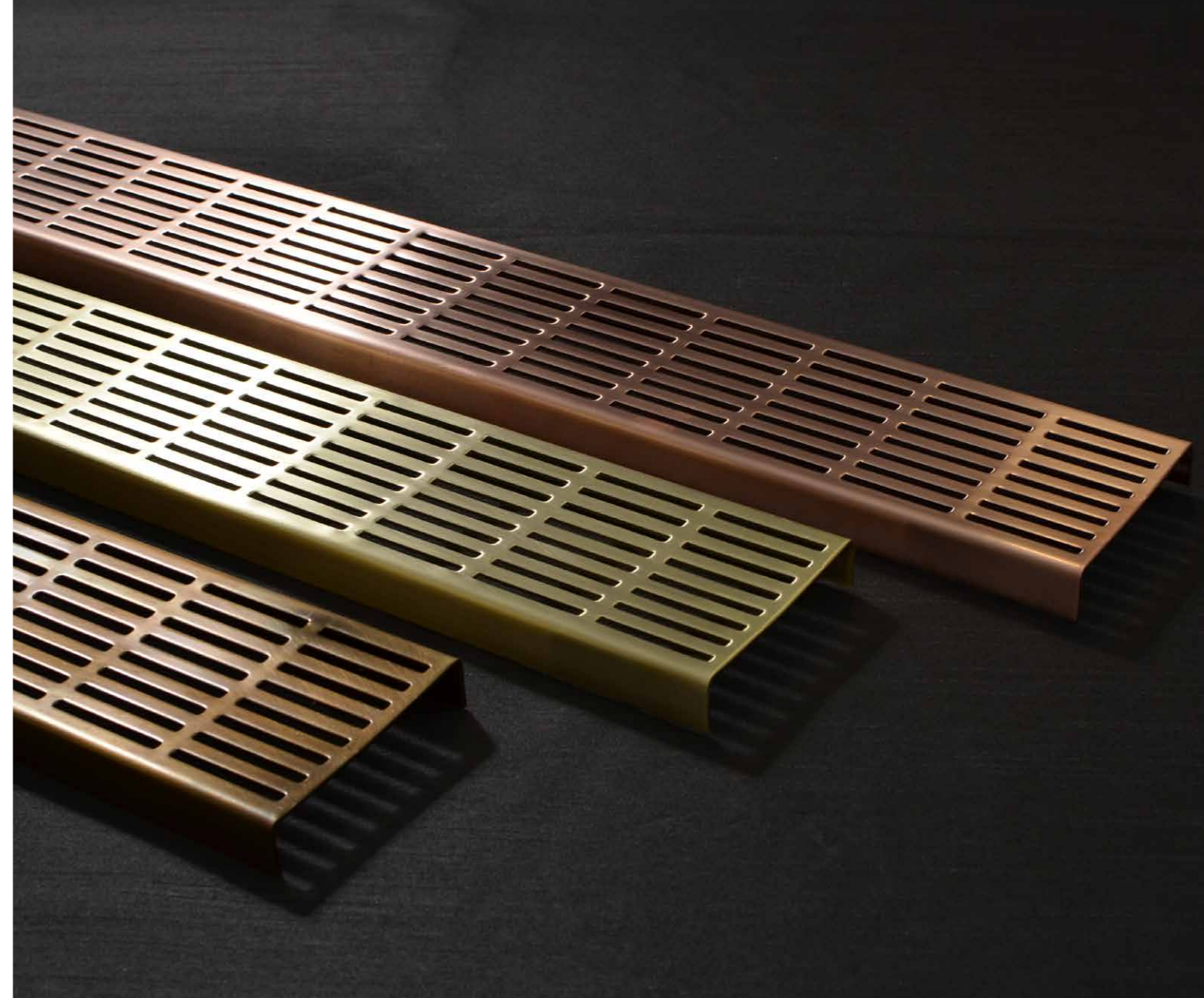
LINEAR DRAINS

Linear drains are also being utilised increasingly within residential environments for a number of practical and aesthetic reasons. From the initial construction of a project, linear drains represent a more practical choice. While a central drain requires multi-directional grading for water to drain properly, a linear drain only requires a single gradient fall, making it easier to install. Furthermore, their ability to form a barrier-free shower makes linear drains much more practicable wherever accessibility is a concern – separating the wet and dry areas of a bathroom without relying on a step or raised lip.

Aesthetically, linear drains fit nicely into the clean aesthetic popular currently, able to blend seamlessly in with the angles of a space. The tiling around linear drains can also remain consistent, not needing the cut-to-fit tiles that are needed around circular drains, which also allows the use of trendy larger format tiles.

CONCLUSION

Far from innovation for innovation's sake, these products have all been designed to make a statement as well as improve quality of life for the end user – whether that is via improving health, offering comfort and customisation, intelligent technological integration, reducing maintenance requirements or simply reducing our impact on the planet.



“ The ability of linear drains to form a barrier-free shower makes them much more practicable wherever accessibility is a concern – separating the wet and dry areas of a bathroom without relying on a step or raised lip. ”



STORMTECH

Australian owned and operated, Stormtech is the original producer of linear drainage. Originating in 1989, they've had a significant amount of time to perfect their product. Stormtech's range of linear drains are meant to look good – being awarded the Build.com Drainage Product of the Year award in 2016, and the 2014 Good Design Selection award and 2013 ICFF Editors' Choice award for the 65MND with internationally acclaimed designer Marc Newson. One of the Editor's Choice jurors went so far as to describe the range as “floor art”.¹

However, years of innovation have also led to a product that is as practical as possible, from installation to maintenance. An effective pre-filtering system prevents foreign bodies such as hair from entering and blocking the drainage network further down the track, which would then require costly mechanical or chemical removal. The materials that go into Stormtech's linear drains are designed to be used and reused, and are made with the highest quality stainless steel to maximise durability and minimise the impact of production on the environment. The socially and environmentally conscious approach that Stormtech have adopted has since earned them GreenTag gold level certification on their entire Slimline range.

As Managing Director Troy Creighton put it, “we wanted [our products] to last for a thousand years, and given the gauge of stainless steel we know they will.”

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